

Washington, D.C. - Congressman David Price

Related Documents: First Responders: Underfunded, Unprepared

During an Appropriations Homeland Security subcommittee hearing, US Rep. David Price (NC-04) has again pressed top Bush Administration officials to justify the drastic cuts they are planning for North Carolina's first responders for the second consecutive year.

During questioning yesterday, Price grilled Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff about the administration's proposed slashing of state block grants, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) preparedness programs, firefighter grants, and COPS (Community Oriented Policing) initiatives.

The President's budget would cut national funding for police overall by nearly 40% and firefighter grants by 30%. During the hearing, Price also continued his criticism of the administration's post-9/11 policy to shift funds to "high-risk" areas, like New York City and Los Angeles, at the expense of overall preparedness. Two-thirds of firefighters, nationwide, don't have the resources to meet minimum staffing requirements as mandated by OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration).

"Not only are our first responders ill-equipped and understaffed to handle potential attacks," Price said to Chertoff. "But they're also struggling to respond to the everyday crises of crime, accidents, fires, and natural disasters."

Chertoff asserted support for first responders and general preparedness, but after the hearing, Price noted, "Once again, officials from this Administration refuse to put money where their mouth is. Publicly, they say they support our local first responders and reiterate how critical they are to the fight on terrorism. But their budget recommends outrageous cuts in the funding our police and firefighters desperately need -- cuts that would put our communities at risk. It just doesn't add up. Our police and fire departments are getting far less federal support than they were before 9/11."

The President's budget would slash funding for the COPS program, which has put 2,934 cops on the street in North Carolina, by 96 percent. It would cut over \$26 million from homeland security formula grants to North Carolina, which police, firefighters and emergency management teams rely on for the training and equipment they need to keep communities safe.

Price, a long-time advocate of local first responders, is widely recognized as the Appropriations Committee's most vocal proponent of support for local police and firefighters. Dozens of North Carolina departments have expressed deep concerns about the ways in which funding cuts are compromising their ability to keep communities safe, and Price continues to bring those concerns to Washington where he confronts Bush Administration officials and works to restore funding to critical first responder programs.

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